

Puerto Rican Center for Health Disparities

As a cultural group, older Puerto Rican adults living on the US mainland have been identified at high risk of experiencing excess chronic conditions particularly; diabetes, depression, and physical impairment. Although health disparities are prevalent, few studies have been conducted on this rapidly growing and generally low-income ethnic group. To reduce health disparities, understanding the factors that combine producing poor health outcomes, is essential.

The overall aim of the proposed Center is to conduct a series of inter-related studies involving a cohort of older adults of Puerto Rican origin, evaluating specific stressors affecting their community, as well as to determine the effect of these stressors on allostatic load and, in turn, on disease specific outcomes. The Center will include 5 research projects.

Center Research

Project 1:

Prospective (2 y) cohort study, will investigate both baseline and 2 year prospective associations between psychosocial stressors and allostatic load; and in turn, allostatic load and functional decline, specifically depression, cognitive decline and physical disability; along with the role of social support, and vitamin intake and status in modifying these associations.

Project 2:

Sociological investigation of psychosocial stressors and their measurement will use both qualitative and quantitative methodology, allowing us to gain a contextual understanding of the sources of stress in this population that relate to allostatic load, and will adapt instruments for its measurement.

Project 3:

Intervention studies will utilize subsets of the baseline study, to investigate the effectiveness of three different 2 y interventions in reducing indicators of allostatic load. Each intervention is designed to be feasible for expansion by community agencies if effective. Interventions include: 1) vitamin supplementation; 2) food coupons and nutrition education; and 3) social support and participation.

Project 4:

Investigation of genetic contributions to allostatic load will explore the relationship between selected gene variants and allostatic load, at baseline and with change over time; and will investigate the interaction between gene variants and responses to the differing nutrition and social interventions.